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Country note**

Tunisia

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Tunisia for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

The situation of children and women

1. Tunisia is characterized by its political stability and by its sustained economic growth (averaging 5.4 per cent per year over the last three years). The per capita gross national product is estimated at $2,100. Despite this growth, unemployment affects almost 16 per cent of the working population, particularly the young. The tenth development plan 2002-2006 focuses on the country's most urgent priorities: human resources development, the fight against unemployment and poverty, the reduction of disparities, regional development and economic reform. Since 1991, sustained efforts have been made to adapt the legal framework to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a child protection code was enacted in 1995. With a population of 9.5 million, the fertility rate has decreased to 2.2 and the rate of urbanization was 62 per cent in 1999, according to the National Statistical Institute (INS).

2. Tunisia has achieved most of the goals of the World Summit for Children. The infant mortality rate (IMR) and the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) are estimated

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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respectively at 24 and 30 per 1,000 live births. More than 90 per cent of pregnant women have benefited from prenatal monitoring and 88 per cent of births are assisted. However, the number of maternal deaths (70 per 100,000 live births in 1993) and the frequency of anaemia in women (26 per cent) although reduced, have not yet met the established goals, and are still disparities between the different regions of the country. Although there is no significant difference between boys and girls, mortality rates in rural areas continue to be twice as high as in urban areas. Despite the fact that it is decreasing, the illiteracy rate is estimated at 27 per cent and includes more than 53 per cent of rural women (INS, 1999). Neonatal mortality accounts for two thirds of infant mortality, which means that the quality of prenatal and birth monitoring needs to be improved. In children under five, stunting is estimated to be 12 per cent at the national level and 18 per cent in rural areas (multiple indicator survey, 2000), and anaemia to be 22 per cent. Since notification of the first case of HIV/AIDS infection (December 1985) and up until the end of 1999, 920 cases had been recorded.

3. Children between 0 and 3 years of age are essentially looked after by their families. Only 13 per cent of children between 3 and 5 years of age receive pre-school education, whose quality is very uneven. Consequently, the family plays an important role but is not always knowledgeable enough to educate and stimulate a young child, owing, in part, to the high rate of illiteracy among rural women. According to the Ministry of Education, 99 per cent of children have access to primary school and the gap between girls and boys has almost been eliminated. The school drop-out rate has decreased significantly at the primary school level (from 7 per cent to 3 per cent over the last decade), but it remains approximately 10 per cent for children between 12 and 16 years of age. Nearly 300,000 children between 6 and 16 years of age are not in school. About 16 per cent of the children repeat a year at the primary school level, and 20 per cent at the secondary level of basic education. The foremost problems in the area of education are essentially related to quality and performance, and there are major disparities between regions and between rural and urban areas.

4. According to qualitative surveys, although two thirds of adolescents state that they have no family problems, it is noticeable that the father is often absent from their conversation. The need to be heard and to receive the information they require are common concerns among the adolescents questioned. However, the way in which existing facilities are organized does not always encourage young people to attend them.

5. Following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the protection system has been characterized by the priority given to prevention policies, with measures such as the creation of the corps of child protection representatives. However, its modus operandi needs to be improved. Since 1995, the Government has prepared an annual report on the situation of children, which is an important means of collecting data and monitoring the situation of children and adolescents. However, the process of preparing this report needs to be improved, particularly with regard to the cross-sectoral approach and analysis.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

6. The mid-term review of the 1997-2001 programme of cooperation highlighted the principal achievements: the contribution to the policy of decentralizing the health system (district health programmes); the "basic skills" approach, aimed at improving the quality of learning, the pilot phase of which was completed leading to its application in all the primary schools throughout the country; and support for the implementation of the corps of child protection representatives in the 23 governorates. It was recommended that increased popular participation should be promoted, cross-sectoral approaches should be strengthened and the decentralization of decision-making should be accompanied by the provision of adequate means.

7. At the central level, the work of advocacy and technical assistance has played an important role in the development of national policies. At the same time, the design of innovative approaches in underprivileged regions and regular monitoring of actions have helped to improve and strengthen the task of providing support at the central level, based on practical experience. These two converging approaches have strengthened UNICEF's credibility with its national partners, and they recognize that it plays the role of both catalyst and facilitator of exchanges of experience. The joint preparation of external evaluations with the Government has played a crucial role in reshaping the strategies of the programme of cooperation and supporting national policies.

Proposed country programme strategy

8. The proposed programme is a continuation of the current programme and is based on the consolidation achievements in education, health and protection. The principal cross-sectoral elements for priority action involve improving the quality of social services, reducing disparities, local capacity-building and the development of a participatory culture. This will be achieved through national capacity-building, high-quality technical assistance, the development, monitoring and evaluation of innovative initiatives in underprivileged regions, and exchanges of experience with other countries. The "adolescent" dimension will cross-cut each programme. Special attention will be given to the effective participation of students in school life and to listening to adolescents in the front-line structures. The proposed programme of cooperation has four components.

9. The education programme aims at ensuring the right of all Tunisian children to high-quality education by improving the educational system in order to reduce the number of students who drop out or repeat a year, and also the disparities between regions and between rural and urban areas. It forms part of an expanded vision of how to prevent social exclusion, identifying the school as the preferred place for promoting the values of citizenship and the participation of children and their families. The programme will endeavour to strengthen coordination and convergence with the World Bank and the European Union and will be designed around two principal components: quality of education and support to priority education areas. UNICEF will support the general application of the "basic skills" approach by contributing to the revision of school programmes and manuals, promoting exchanges of experience, communication, and the systematization of studies to monitor the quality of education. Once it has helped to identify underprivileged schools and action strategies for the priority education area

programme, UNICEF will support the development of innovative experiences aimed at improving the teaching environment, at training and at setting up school councils.

10. The health and development programme will be designed around two integrated elements: improving the quality of delivery of the basic health services, and helping to educate families, in order to ensure the integral development of the child, focusing on children in the 0 to 3 years age group. By capitalizing on the achievements of the previous programme, UNICEF will continue to support national strategies aimed at establishing district health programmes, auditing maternal deaths, and preventing and attending cases of anaemia. The quality control process will be improved by training local teams and sharing experiences. Research-action will be encouraged in order to maintain a constant dialogue with the community. Different ways of integrating a service for listening to young people into the health centres will be tested and then evaluated and extended throughout the country. The model for the integrated care of children's diseases will be improved by incorporating developmental elements and the early detection of disabilities, and also by an anaemia component. The educational aspects of promoting better care for children in the home will also be strengthened, by an information campaign at the community level and in the media addressed to mothers and families, in collaboration with the literacy network and non-governmental organizations. Its impact on improving the population's understanding and changing their behaviour will be evaluated during and at the end of the cycle.

11. The social integration and protection programme is directed at children and adolescents who are at risk of being marginalized. The training for child protection representatives will be extended to all actors in the judicial and social protection system. The programme will help to strengthen the mechanisms of the protection system and harmonize the different types of action; it will also encourage collaboration between the actors in the context of cross-sectoral protection networks. At the beginning of the cycle, a few selected experiences at the regional level will provide a basis for a model for operating as a network, which will gradually be extended to the other governorates. The acceptance of children with disabilities in the regular school system will be further promoted by advocacy and testing, with a view to gradually adopting and expanding this approach. UNICEF will continue to advocate that the time spent in institutions should be reduced and that alternative solutions should be sought for children deprived of a family setting.

12. The programme to monitor and promote the rights of the child will provide technical support for the preparation of the annual report on children, by strengthening coordination between the departments concerned and harmonization of the indicators, and will bolster the existing data collection systems. In order to establish a culture of the rights of the child in society, the programme will develop alliances with non-governmental organizations, universities, the media and the private sector, to provide them with information and involve them in specific actions in favour of positive changes in behaviour.

13. The cross-sectoral costs will allow an integrated programme monitoring and evaluation plan to be developed in order to ensure that activities in the field are monitored and to improve teamwork and the multi-disciplinary approach within the office and with partners. A strategy for mobilizing resources and strengthening alliances with donors will be prepared subsequently.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme of cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Education	959	1 750	2 709
Health and development	900	300	1 200
Social integration and protection	330	350	680
Monitoring and promotion of the rights of the child	140	100	240
Cross-sectoral costs	1 000	0	1 000
Total	**3 329**	**2 500**	**5 829**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.